

United States District Court
Western District of Wisconsin
Robert W. Kastenmeier Courthouse
120 North Henry Street, Room 560
Madison, Wisconsin 53703

Chambers of
William M. Conley
District Judge

Telephone
608-264-5087

August 27, 2021

Counsel of Record

RE: Slifer v. Merck & Co., Inc., *et al.*
Case No. 12-cv-728-wmc

Dear Counsel:

I have been contacted by Judge William M. Conley who presided over the above-mentioned case.

Judge Conley informed me that it has been brought to his attention that while he presided over the case he owned stock in Merck. His ownership of stock neither affected nor impacted his decisions in this case. However, his stock ownership would have required recusal under the Code of Conduct for United States Judges, and thus, Judge Conley directed that I notify the parties of the conflict.

Advisory Opinion 71, from the Judicial Conference Codes of Conduct Committee, provides the following guidance for addressing disqualification that is not discovered until after a judge has participated in a case:

[A] judge should disclose to the parties the facts bearing on disqualification as soon as those facts are learned, even though that may occur after entry of the decision. The parties may then determine what relief they may seek and a court (without the disqualified judge) will decide the legal consequence, if any, arising from the participation of the disqualified judge in the entered decision.

Although Advisory Opinion 71 contemplated disqualification after a Court of Appeals oral argument, the Committee explained “[s]imilar considerations would apply when a judgment was entered in a district court by a judge and it is later learned that the judge was disqualified.”

With Advisory Opinion 71 in mind, you are invited to respond to Judge Conley’s disclosure of a conflict in this case. Should you wish to respond, please submit your response on or before October 27, 2021. Any response will be considered by Chief Judge James D. Peterson of this court without the participation of Judge Conley.

Sincerely,

Joel Turner
Chief Deputy Clerk

JT/cak